



The Purple Book — Social Field Guide

Manage absence, re-entry, boundaries, awkwardness, and graceful exits.

Actual emergency?

Stop reading and use the local emergency number. In the EU, call **112**. If calling is unsafe, get to a safer place or ask a trusted person to call.

What this book is for

- Do I need to communicate?
- Am I returning or leaving?
- Is this awkward or actually unsafe?

What this book does

Social absence, communication scripts, re-entry, boundaries, and graceful exits.

What it hands off

Active threats and clinical treatment; those hand off to Blue, Red, or Indigo.

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You retreated to the bathroom. Maybe you had a reason. Maybe you had seven reasons stacked on top of each other wearing a trench coat. Either way, you're here now, and the social situation you left is still out there, ticking like a parking meter.

This guide covers the part nobody else writes about: what happens between you and other people when a bathroom becomes a control room. Communication, re-entry, cover stories, boundaries, and the moments when a social emergency stops being social and starts being actually dangerous.

Read what applies. Skip what doesn't. Nothing here requires you to become a different person — just a slightly more strategic version of the one you already are.

Quick reference — social router

[soc.1.1]

Four questions, in order. The first one outranks the other three.

BATHROOM SOCIAL TRIAGE

1. Am I safe?
 - └ NO, or I cannot tell → Section 7. Get another person involved. Do not go back in alone.
 - └ YES → continue.
2. Does anyone actually need to hear from me?
 - └ Nobody is waiting on me → no. Come back when ready.
 - └ One person would worry, or is holding something for me → one bounded message (Templates A–D).
 - └ The thing cannot continue without me → say so plainly, or leave properly (Template E).
3. Am I ready to go back?
 - └ YES → Section 6. Pick one thing that is not you.
 - └ MAYBE → change one thing (Section 3), set a limit, try.
 - └ NO → leave (Section 5). Send the message from outside.
4. Is this a pattern?
 - └ Rarely → an ordinary evening. File under "survived."
 - └ Often, and it is narrowing where I go → the Teal Book for the acute part, the Indigo Book for the plan. This is treatable, not a character flaw.

1 — You Left the Room. Now What.

[soc.1.2]

People notice patterns, not stopwatches

A brief absence usually needs no explanation. A longer absence may benefit from one message to one person. Context matters more than a universal minute count: a board meeting, a date, a house party, and a family gathering operate on entirely different clocks.

The useful rule is simple: **when silence is likely to create concern or practical problems, send one bounded message before your anxiety writes a six-part miniseries about it.**

Cover Stories and Their Shelf Life

Privacy does not require autobiography, and it does not require inventing a medical subplot. You are not obliged to explain your internal state to anyone who happens to share a floor plan with you — and you can decline to explain without making anything up.

Use the smallest true sentence that does the job. The levels are about how much you disclose, not about how many minutes have elapsed.

Level 0 — No explanation

- Walk back in. Say nothing. Sit down. This works far more often than anxiety predicts.

Level 1 — Minimal fact

- “Needed a minute.”
- “Had to deal with something.”
- “Stepped out for a bit.” (Vague is fine. Vague is allowed. Vague is *true*.)

Level 2 — Bounded update

- “Had to deal with something. I’m okay enough now.”
- “Wasn’t feeling 100%. I’m deciding whether to stay.”

Level 3 — Honest summary

- “I got overwhelmed and needed to reset.”
- “I’m having a hard day. I needed a minute.”

Level 4 — Privacy boundary

- “I’m handling it, but I’d rather not go into detail.”
- “Thanks for checking. I don’t want to discuss it right now.”

Note what is missing: the invented phone call, the fictional medication, the stomach complaint you do not have. Those work right up until someone follows up kindly and you have to maintain a small fictional universe while already depleted. A true short sentence needs no maintenance.

A low-disclosure explanation has no fixed shelf life. If the same problem keeps removing you from the room, the useful change is rarely a more elaborate sentence. It is a clearer update — “I’m not feeling great, I might head out” — or a decision about leaving, asking for support, or dealing with the pattern another day.

A brief absence, versus a situation that changed while you were gone

The threshold that matters is not a number on a clock. It is whether anything out there has actually moved.

A short absence disappears into ordinary room noise. A longer one does not: the conversation moves, rearranges its furniture, and possibly forgets you were in it. Food arrives. Rides leave. Meetings decide things. People who were counting on you start wondering. That is not cruelty — social groups are streams, not lakes. They flow whether or not you’re standing in them.

The strategic implication: if you already know you will be gone long enough to affect what someone else is doing, **send a message early**. An early message buys space. Waiting until several people are searching for you makes the eventual explanation do unnecessary heavy lifting.

2 — Communication Templates

[soc.1.3]

When to Text vs Call vs Say Nothing

SCENARIO	BEST CHANNEL	WHY
Brief, and nobody is depending on you	Say nothing	There is no communication problem yet.
Long enough to cause concern or affect plans	Text one person	Creates one informed ally without broadcasting.
You might need to leave	Text, then possibly call	Escalation ladder. Don’t open with the nuclear option.
You need someone to come to you	Call or text with “can you come here”	Urgency is clearer in a call. Text if you can’t speak.

SCENARIO	BEST CHANNEL	WHY
You've decided to leave entirely	Text after you've left	Compose it from safety, not from the bathroom floor.
You're in danger	Use the emergency route that fits the threat — 110 for an active police threat, 112 for medical, fire or rescue danger. A trusted person is support in parallel, not a substitute.	See Section 7. This is no longer a social problem.

The Templates

Copy, adapt, send. These are starting points, not sacred texts.

Template A — “I’m fine, need a minute”

Hey — I’m fine, just needed a few minutes to myself. Be back soon. Don’t wait for me for [food/the toast/the next round].

Use when: you’re coming back, you just need space, and you want to prevent a search party.

Template B — “I’m not feeling well, might need to leave”

I’m not feeling great — might need to head out early. Don’t worry, nothing serious. I’ll let you know.

Use when: you’re on the fence about staying. This buys you a graceful exit without committing to it.

Template C — “Can you come get me”

Can you come to [bathroom/hallway/outside]? I could use some company for a minute. Not an emergency, just need a person.

Or, if it *is* more urgent:

I need you to come to [location]. Please come now. I’ll explain when you’re here.

Use when: you need physical presence. The second version skips the reassurance — use it when you mean it.

Template D — “Please cover for me”

Hey, I need to step out for a bit. If anyone asks, can you just say I’m taking a call / not feeling well / had to step out? I’ll explain later. Thanks.

Use when: you need a social proxy. Choose someone who can lie casually and without visible moral crisis. This is a kindness they’re doing for you — thank them later.¹

Template E — “I’m leaving”

I’m heading out. Thanks for [tonight/having me/the invite]. I’ll text you tomorrow.

Use when: the decision is made. Keep it short. Explanations invite negotiation, and you’ve already negotiated with yourself enough for one evening.

Template F — “I need help” (to a professional or crisis line)

I’m in a situation where I don’t feel safe. I’m at [location]. I need [specific help].

Use when: this has crossed from social discomfort to genuine danger. See Section 7.

Customization Notes

- Replace bracketed text with specifics.
- Remove the reassurance lines (“don’t worry,” “not an emergency”) if the situation *is* worrying or *is* an emergency. False reassurance costs credibility.
- These templates work via text, WhatsApp, Signal, DM, note slid under a door, or whatever medium is available. The format matters less than the sending.

3 — The Mirror Conversation

[soc.1.4]

You're Looking at Yourself

You washed your hands (or didn't — no judgment) and now you're staring into the mirror. The mirror is returning your gaze with the enthusiasm of a passport photo.

This is the moment where the brain often decides to run a full performance review. Not a helpful one — the kind where every metric is appearance, every benchmark is someone else, and the reviewer is a version of you that hasn't slept in three days.

What the Mirror Actually Is

The mirror is a reflective surface. It shows you what light does when it bounces off your face. It does not show you:

- What other people think of you
- Whether you are fundamentally acceptable
- The cumulative score of your life decisions
- How you compare to anyone who isn't currently standing in this bathroom

Social comparison in front of a mirror is a well-documented anxiety amplifier. Your brain is comparing a real, tired, stressed face against idealized, curated, well-lit memories of other people's faces. This is not a fair trial.²

The Shame Spiral and How to Interrupt It

Shame spirals have a characteristic loop: *I look bad* → *I am bad* → *everyone can see I'm bad* → *I should hide* → *I'm hiding, which proves I'm bad*. Each iteration feels like new evidence, but it's the same thought wearing different hats.

Interrupt the loop with action, not argument:

1. **Splash cold water on your wrists or face.** Sensory interruption. Changes the channel.³
2. **Fix exactly one thing.** Hair, collar, smudge, whatever. One. Not a full renovation — a single concrete change you can see.
3. **Say one factual sentence about your appearance.** "My shirt is blue." Not evaluative, not comparative. Factual. This is affect labeling applied to the visual field.⁴

4. **Step back from the mirror.** Literally. One step. The close-up is not how anyone else sees you.
5. **Leave the mirror’s jurisdiction.** Turn around. The review is over. You did not need to pass it because it was never a real exam.

Quick Resets

PROBLEM	FIX	TIME
Red/puffy eyes	Cool water on closed eyelids, 30 seconds	1 min
Flushed face	Cool wrists under tap, slow breathing	2 min
Mascara situation	Damp tissue, gentle dab (don’t rub)	1 min
Hair chaos	Wet fingers, smooth the obvious parts	30 sec
“I look terrible”	You look like a person who is having a hard time. That’s allowed.	0 sec

The goal is not to look perfect. The goal is to look like someone who used a bathroom, which is exactly what you did.

4 — Navigating Specific Social Contexts

[soc.1.5]

This is **field lore, not municipal regulation**. Role, dependency, timing and the specific people involved decide this, not a stopwatch.

Every social setting has an unwritten absence policy. Here’s the cheat sheet.

CONTEXT	WHEN ABSENCE STARTS TO BE NOTICED	WHO MIGHT NEED TO KNOW	A TRUE SHORT SENTENCE	WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS
Work meeting	when your role, turn, or task is affected	the chair, or one colleague	“Had to step out; I’m back.”	responsibility, not elapsed minutes

CONTEXT	WHEN ABSENCE STARTS TO BE NOTICED	WHO MIGHT NEED TO KNOW	A TRUE SHORT SENTENCE	WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS
Work event / conference	when somebody is waiting on you	one colleague	"Needed a minute."	events have movement and parallel conversations
Family gathering	whenever your particular family starts doing family	one ally	"Needed some space."	family norms vary catastrophically
Date	early, because the social unit is tiny	your date	"Just need a minute — I'll be back."	your absence is 50% of the population leaving
House party	when the host or a friend might reasonably worry	host or one friend	"Stepped away for a bit."	people move between rooms; roll calls are rare
Bar / club	when your group may leave or need a safety check	one person in your group	"I'm at [place], all okay."	group safety out-ranks etiquette
School / university	when attendance, supervision, or a task is affected	the responsible person, if any	"I need to step out."	formal rules may genuinely apply
Public transit	when companions or onward plans are affected	your companion, if any	"Catching the next one."	transport waits for nobody and judges nobody
Religious service	when a role or a companion is affected	usually nobody	none required	local norms vary
Wedding	around ceremonies, speeches, photos, transport	your +1, the host, or one friend	"Needed a minute."	key moments matter more than total time

Context-Specific Notes

Work meetings: If you left a meeting that's still running, you can re-enter with a nod and sit down. Don't announce your return. Don't apologize unless you were presenting. The meeting did not stop for you — that's a feature, not an insult.

Dates: A date absence is high-stakes because the social unit is small. If you're gone more than ten minutes, text. Not texting says "I climbed out the window," which may or may not be accurate but is definitely what they're thinking.⁵

Family gatherings: Family dynamics are beyond the scope of this guide and possibly beyond the scope of most guides. The one useful principle: identify your ally before you need them. Every family has one person who will cover for you without requiring a thesis defense. Find them. Brief them. Use them.

Weddings: Do not disappear during the ceremony, first dance, or speeches. Everything else is fair game. Weddings have enough chaos that your absence will be attributed to "getting a drink" by default.

5 — Boundary Setting From a Bathroom [soc.1.6]

Sometimes the Bathroom Isn't About the Bathroom

Sometimes you're not in here because of anxiety or nausea or needing to cry. Sometimes you're in here because the room you left contains a person or situation that you needed distance from. That's not avoidance — that's spatial boundary enforcement. The bathroom is a socially sanctioned airlock.

Quick Boundary Scripts

These are for when you return — or for when someone follows you to the door.

"I need space right now"

"I need a few minutes to myself. I'll come find you when I'm ready."

Translation: back off. The phrasing is polite. The content is a wall. Both are intentional.

"This conversation needs to pause"

"I can't have this conversation right now. Can we come back to it [tomorrow / when we've both had some space]?"

Use when: the argument followed you or is waiting for you. Pausing is not losing. It's refusing to play on a tilted board.

"I don't want to discuss this"

"I'm not going to talk about that right now."

No "sorry." No "if that's okay." The sentence is complete. You may add a redirect: "Let's talk about something else" or "I'm going to get some water." Movement ends conversations that words won't.

"You need to stop"

"Stop. I've asked you to stop and I mean it."

Use when: someone is pushing past a boundary you've already set. Repetition is not escalation — it's emphasis. You are allowed to say the same thing twice, louder, without it being "dramatic."

"I'm leaving"

"I'm going to go. I'll be in touch when I'm ready."

The cleanest boundary. It requires no agreement from the other person. You do not need permission to leave a room you are not imprisoned in.

When to Return vs When to Leave Entirely

SIGNAL	ACTION
You needed space and got it. You feel steadier.	Return.
The situation hasn't changed, but you can manage it.	Return with a plan (time limit, ally, exit route).
The person or situation will immediately re-trigger you.	Leave.
You're dreading going back more than you dread leaving.	Leave.
Someone has been aggressive, threatening, or coercive.	Leave. See Section 7.

SIGNAL	ACTION
You've been in here 45+ minutes and can't face going back.	Leave. The event is over for you. That's allowed.

The Irish Goodbye

The Irish goodbye — leaving without announcing your departure — has an undeservedly bad reputation. In practice, it is often the most gracious exit available. Here's when it works:

Good candidates for the Irish goodbye:

- Large gatherings (10+ people) where your departure won't create a visible gap
- Situations where saying goodbye will trigger a negotiation ("No, stay! One more drink!")
- When you've already said goodbye to the host or the person who matters
- When the alternative is a scene
- When you genuinely cannot produce one more social interaction

Poor candidates for the Irish goodbye:

- Dinner parties where you're one of six people at a table
- Events where you're the guest of honor (your absence will be the main event)
- Situations where someone is relying on you for a ride home
- When someone will genuinely worry about your safety

Execution: Gather your things. Leave normally. Do not start fresh rounds of farewell if avoiding another negotiation was the entire point. Text the host once you are outside: "Had to head out — thanks for tonight." Done.

6 — Re-Entry Strategies

[soc.1.7]

The Walk Back In

You've decided to return. The door is in front of you. Your hand is on the handle. Your brain is projecting a fantasy where the entire room turns to stare at you in unison, like meerkats sensing a hawk.

It will usually be far less noticeable than it feels. People systematically overestimate how much others register their appearance and behaviour — the spotlight effect.⁶ That is not a promise that nobody noticed you were gone. It is a reason to stop appointing yourself the room's official audience-measurement device.

Before you open the door: pick something outside yourself

Do **not** run a live facial-expression debugger. Auditing your own shoulders, jaw and walking speed puts your attention exactly where it is least useful, and it is one of the things social-anxiety treatment works to undo — attention turned inward, checking, and small managing behaviours are what keep the fear running.⁷

So pick one thing that is not you:

- a person you know;
- your seat;
- the conversation already happening;
- water, food, or a small practical task;
- your exit route, if you are going back in with a plan.

If a shoulder drops or a jaw unclenches on its own, good. It does not need certification. You do not need to smile, and you do not need to perform joy. You need to look like a person who went to the bathroom and came back — which is, again, exactly what you did.

Conversation Re-Entry

The seamless slide: Walk to someone you know. Stand near them. Wait for a natural pause. Say something about whatever they're discussing, or ask a simple question. You are now part of the conversation again. Nobody issued you a re-entry visa because none was required.

The activity anchor: Get a drink. Get food. Check your phone at the periphery. These are all normal re-entry decompression activities. They buy you 2–3 minutes of legitimate social invisibility while you recalibrate.

The direct address: Walk up to someone specific. "Hey — what did I miss?" This works because it acknowledges the gap without dramatizing it. The answer is usually "nothing" or a quick summary, and then you're back in.

The group re-merge: If you left a group conversation, return to its vicinity and listen for 30 seconds before contributing. The group will naturally re-absorb you. Social groups are amoebas — they extend and retract around members without requiring a formal docking procedure.

What to Do With Your Face

Your face is going to do whatever it does. The main risk is over-correction: smiling so hard you look manic, or arranging your features into “casual” so deliberately that you look like a hostage in a proof-of-life video.

Let your face be a face. It will settle into something normal faster than you think, especially once you’re engaged in conversation rather than monitoring your own expressions from the inside.

The “I’m Fine” Hierarchy

If someone asks how you are — and they might — here’s your response ladder, calibrated to the level of inquiry:

LEVEL	THEIR QUESTION	YOUR RESPONSE
Casual check	“You good?” / “Everything okay?”	“Yeah, all good.” (Smile optional.)
Mild concern	“You were gone a while — everything alright?”	“Yeah, just needed a minute. I’m fine.”
Genuine worry	“Are you okay? I was worried.”	“I’m okay. Wasn’t feeling great but I’m better now. Thanks for checking.”
Full interrogation	“What happened? Where were you? Are you sure you’re okay?”	“I appreciate you asking. I had a rough moment but I’m handling it. I’d rather not go into detail — can we just [rejoin the party / get back to it]?”
Persistent probing	They won’t let it go.	“I’ve said I’m okay. I mean it. Let’s move on.” (Boundary. See Section 5.)

Note: someone asking if you’re okay is usually kindness, not surveillance. Accept it with the same brevity you’d want if the roles were reversed.¹

7 — When Social Emergency Becomes Real Emergency

[soc.1.8]

The Line Between Uncomfortable and Unsafe

Most of this guide deals with social discomfort — the awkwardness, anxiety, and logistical complexity of being a person in a room with other people. That is real, it is stressful, and it is not dangerous.

But sometimes it is dangerous. The bathroom can be a refuge from something genuinely threatening, and the skills required shift from “manage re-entry” to “get safe.”

How to Tell the Difference

SOCIAL EMERGENCY	REAL EMERGENCY
You feel anxious about returning	You feel afraid of a specific person
You're embarrassed	You've been threatened
You want to avoid awkwardness	You want to avoid harm
You're overwhelmed by stimulation	You're being followed, pressured, or coerced
Leaving would be socially uncomfortable	Leaving feels physically dangerous
You're worried about judgment	You're worried about violence

If you're reading the right column and recognizing your situation, this is no longer a social field guide problem. This is a safety problem.

Signs That the Situation You Left Is Genuinely Dangerous

- Someone has threatened you — verbally, physically, or through intimidation
- Someone is monitoring or controlling your movement, communication, or ability to leave
- You are intoxicated or drugged beyond your own intentional consumption
- Someone will not accept “no” or “stop” as answers
- You feel you cannot leave safely
- A weapon is present or has been referenced
- You are afraid of what will happen when you go back out

Any one of these is enough. You do not need all of them. You do not need to be “sure enough.” If several items fit, treat the concern seriously and involve another person or a specialist service rather than arguing yourself into returning.⁸

What to Do

If you can call for help:

1. Call **112** (EU emergency) or **110** (police, Germany). In other regions, call your local emergency number.
2. If speaking may increase danger, state the location and the need in as few words as possible — an address and “help” is a complete emergency call. Silent routes exist, but they are set up in advance, not in the moment: in Germany the official emergency app is **nora**, which reaches the same control rooms as 110 and 112 without speaking, and requires installing and registering it beforehand.⁹ Assume nothing else texts through unless you have confirmed it for your own country.
3. Text a trusted person your location and the word “help” or a pre-arranged code word.
4. If the threat is immediately outside the door, a locked door between you and it is worth keeping — stay behind it while it is the safer side. Leave anyway if the room itself stops being safe: fire or smoke, a hazardous atmosphere, the door being forced, or an emergency responder telling you to come out.

If you can leave safely:

1. Leave. Do not announce it. Do not negotiate. Do not collect your things if collecting them means going back into the unsafe space.
2. Go to a public, populated area.
3. Call someone — friend, family, crisis line, police — from safety.
4. Do not return alone.

If you cannot call or leave:

1. Text if possible. Location + “I need help.”
2. Make noise if the situation escalates — bang on walls, shout, activate a personal alarm if you have one.
3. If in a public venue, call out to staff or other people.

Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Resources

If the person you're hiding from is a partner, family member, or someone in your household, this section is for you. You do not need to have been physically hit to use these resources. Coercion, threats, isolation, and control are violence.¹⁰

Germany:

- **Hilfetelefon Gewalt gegen Frauen:** 116 016 (24/7, multilingual, anonymous, free)¹¹
- **Hilfetelefon Gewalt an Männern:** 0800 123 99 00

International:

- National domestic violence hotlines exist in virtually every country. Search “domestic violence hotline [your country]” or ask any emergency operator to connect you.

Safety planning:

- If you suspect your phone is monitored, use a friend's phone, a public phone, or a library computer.
- Prefer a trusted device when monitoring is possible. Sudden history deletion or account changes can themselves be visible, so ask a specialist service for a device-safety plan that fits the situation.

You are not overreacting. You are not making a fuss. You are reading a section of a guide that exists because this happens often enough that it needed to be written. If this is your situation, reaching out is not dramatic — it is precisely appropriate.

Social Anxiety vs Actual Threat — A Clarification

Both can feel identical from the inside — racing heart, dread, a strong pull toward the door. The felt intensity does not tell you which one you are in. What you are predicting does.

- **Social anxiety** predicts *being judged*: that you will be watched, found awkward, or thought badly of. The fear is about other people's opinion of you, and it turns up whether or not anyone has actually done anything.¹²
- **A threat** is something a specific person is *doing*: threatening, blocking, following, refusing “no”, controlling where you go or who you can reach. It points at behaviour you could describe to a stranger.

The responses differ accordingly. Anxiety: the Calm Guide, grounding, gradual re-entry, professional support if it persists. Threat: the safety protocols above — you cannot ground your way out of someone else's behaviour, so get safe first and process later.

If there is a concrete threat cue, or you genuinely cannot tell whether you are safe right now, choose safety and involve another person. The worst outcome of treating a threat as social anxiety is far worse than the worst outcome of the reverse.

That rule is for uncertainty about immediate danger. It is not a way of life. If the fear of being watched and judged returns often, with no threatening behaviour from anyone, running the emergency protocol every time will make the fear stronger rather than smaller — avoidance is one of the things that keeps it going. Use the Calm Guide, and Professional Support if it is narrowing your life. Planned treatment can work on that gradually, without asking you to gamble with actual safety.⁷

The Purple Book. Social Field Guide. Bathroom Emergency Guide 4.x-alt. You were a person before you walked into this room. You're still one now. Go be one out there.

Where next?

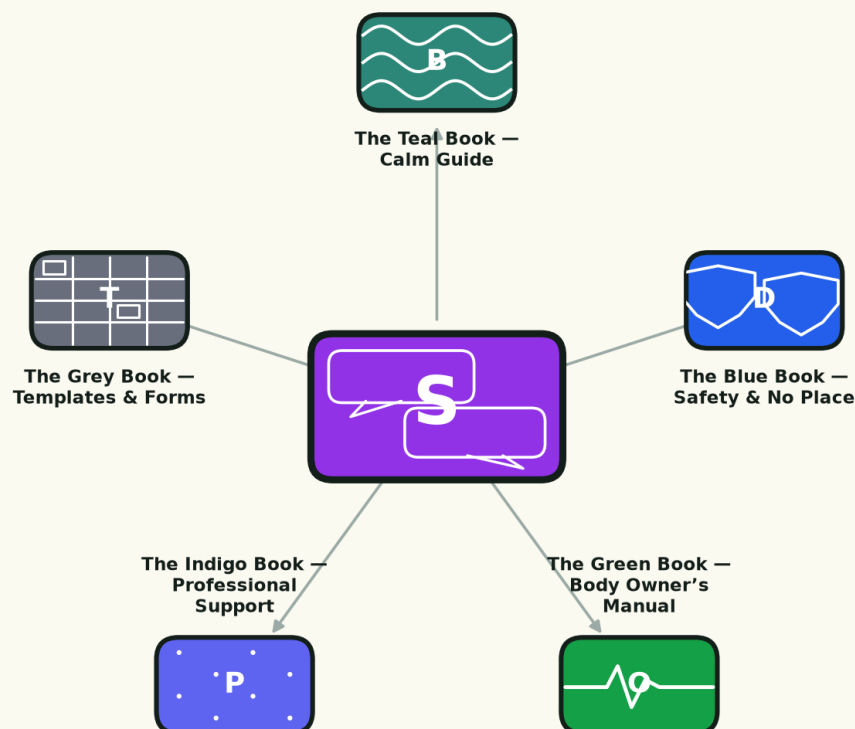
S

You do not need to complete the shelf in order. Stay here while this is the primary problem; move when another title becomes more accurate.

- **B — The Teal Book — Calm Guide** — use it when that problem becomes primary.
- **D — The Blue Book — Safety & No Place** — use it when that problem becomes primary.
- **O — The Green Book — Body Owner's Manual** — use it when that problem becomes primary.
- **P — The Indigo Book — Professional Support** — use it when that problem becomes primary.
- **T — The Grey Book — Templates & Forms** — use it when that problem becomes primary.

LARGE PRINT / TEXT ROUTE FOLLOWS

You are here: S — The Purple Book — Social Field Guide



Complete route names follow as text. Immediate danger bypasses this map.

Connections from S — The Purple Book — Social Field Guide

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<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg159/chapter/recommendations>↵↵
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10. World Health Organization, *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018* (Geneva: WHO, 2021). Intimate partner violence includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as controlling behaviours. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>↵
11. Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben, "Hilfetelefon Gewalt gegen Frauen," <https://www.hilfetelefon.de/> — 24/7, anonymous, free, available in 18 languages.↵
12. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed., text rev. (DSM-5-TR, 2022). Social anxiety disorder criteria distinguish persistent fear of social situations from situational threat responses.↵